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Decolonising the History of Internationalism: Transnational Activism across the South

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Abstract

The history of internationalism has tended to focus on power centres in the Global North – London, Geneva, New York, Paris – and institutions like the League of Nations, United Nations and UNESCO. What happens when we flip our perspective, and view internationalism from the point of view of the decolonising South? What do we get when we shift our focus from world leaders to the internationalism of activists, intellectuals, feminists, poets, artists, rebels and insurgents operating in Asia and Africa? Moreover, how are our methods of researching and debating international history – in universities, archives and conferences in the Global North – structured by economic inequalities, colonial legacies and visa regimes that limit participation by scholars from the South? This paper considers how we might decolonise both the content and the methods of international history, focusing especially on leftist internationalism and South–South connections in Southeast Asia and the wider Global South.

Keywords: Decolonisation; international history; methodology; Global South

The Royal Historical Society's 2018 report on race, equality and inclusion served as a catalyst to highlight racial under-representation in the discipline.¹ It insisted on the importance of globalising and diversifying our teaching curriculum, including challenging Eurocentric perspectives and critically engaging with imperial legacies. Yet if our universities are to be led by research, we must look to decolonising not only the content of our teaching but also our research practices. In this context, to decolonise is not only to think globally and inclusively, but to be fully attuned to structures of power

¹ Hannah Atkinson *et al.*, *Race, Ethnicity, and Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change* (2018).

and inequality that are historically embedded in our disciplines. In this paper, I focus on the field of international history, which has the capacity to globalise and expand our thinking about the mechanisms and mentalities of internationalism but also to replicate the perspectives of international institutions and organisations (and crucially, their archives) in emphasising the centrality of the Global North at the expense of the Global South.²

Both global and international history are fields that have grown exceedingly popular with researchers and students alike in the last two decades. They promise a more widely connected and comparative outlook to a discipline that has long been dominated by Western European and American history. But as with any field of history, we must constantly consider the actors on which we focus, the methods we use and the questions we are asking of the field. In this paper, I hope first to highlight ways we might decolonise the content of international history, amplifying recent scholarship that subverts conventional histories of internationalism by focusing on the connections between activists across the Global South. Secondly, I want to highlight new perspectives on international history that might emerge through methodologies of collaborative and participatory research – both with scholars in the academy with research specialities across Asia, Africa and Latin America, and with independent scholars, including activists and curators, from South and Southeast Asia.

Centring the South in the history of internationalism

Internationalism, as Glenda Sluga has reminded us, can involve either the expression of an idea or embody international institutions themselves. Its history has been traced to the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism of Kant and Bentham, to nineteenth-century institutions such as the Concert of Europe or to the internationalism of organisations like the Comintern, whose Moscow-based networks reached out like tentacles to the Global South.³ In this perspective, internationalism as an idea originates in the North and is diffused to the South. But what does internationalism mean if we root such ideas and institutions in the Global South? What new perspectives do we gain from

² 'Global South' is an imperfect term that, taken literally, might encompass a wide range of countries in the southern hemisphere with wildly different degrees of economic development. It is both complex and contradictory, denoting what Nina Schneider sees as a metaphorical, political or relational struggle against present-day global inequalities between North and South, one rooted in historical legacies of colonialism and development that benefited the North at the expense of the South. I follow Pamela Gupta, Christopher J. Lee, Marissa J. Moorman and Sandhya Shukla and use it here not only to acknowledge this history of struggle and solidarity, but because of the challenge it poses to 'the geopolitical frameworks of the United States and Europe from a territorial standpoint, underscoring the role alternative regional and global geographies can play in remaking a world order'. See 'Editor's Introduction', *Radical History Review*, 131 (2018), 1–12. See also Nina Schneider, 'Between Promise and Skepticism: The Global South and Our Role as Engaged Intellectuals', *The Global South*, 11, no. 2 (2017), 18–38.

³ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2012); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, 'Rethinking the History of Internationalism', in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge, 2017), 3–4.

tracing lineages of internationalism as specialists in South and Southeast Asia, the African continent, Latin America or the Caribbean?

The intellectual history of internationalism arose after World War II and focused largely on European interstate relations. As Robbie Shilliam has argued, even as the study of non-Western actors, movements and ideologies shaped the development of the discipline, it has long ignored the role of non-Western *thinkers*.⁴ Recently, Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler brought scholars together to interrogate the omission of women in the early canon of international intellectual history.⁵ The volume focused largely on actors based in Europe and America and *their* interactions with the wider world, pointing to the urgent need for the field to address its own geographical myopia.⁶ Yet the volume's interventions – particularly those on African American intellectuals – have nonetheless provided welcome and fundamental tools to enrich and decolonise the intellectual history of internationalism, centring women, globalising the field, posing important questions of who gets counted as an intellectual, and addressing dynamics of gender and race that shape the field.⁷ As I hope to show, decolonising the history of internationalism is an inter-sectional project, intimately connected not only to an intellectual history of internationalism which has long neglected women, thinkers of colour and perspectives from the Global South, but a history of decolonisation that has also long focused on the state arena, marginalising women and non-state actors.

International history was long predicated on the study of cooperation between states; the nation was a paramount category of analysis, even as historians recognised the way in which nations morphed and changed. Global history, by contrast, meant overcoming history's traditional focus on the nation state, stressing mobility, interconnection and exchange. Over the past two decades, the global turn has invited a wider re-examination of the history of internationalism. Black internationalism has become a vibrant field of study in itself, uncovering the way in which African Americans, in particular, channelled pan-African and anti-colonial networks abroad.⁸ In their wider works,

⁴ Robbie Shilliam, 'Non-Western Thought and International Relations', in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (2011), ch. 2.

⁵ Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (eds.), *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge, 2021).

⁶ My full review of the volume, and the editors' response to this point, is in *Roundtable Review*, 14–30 (2021), <https://issforum.org/to/jrt14-30>.

⁷ Imaobong D. Umoren, 'Ideas in Action: Eslanda Robeson's International Thought after 1945', in *Women's International Thought: A New History*, ed. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (Cambridge, 2021), 93–112; Robbie Shilliam, 'Theorizing (with) Amy Ashwood Garvey', *ibid.*, 158–78; Keisha Blain, "'The Dark Skin[ned] People of the Eastern World": Mittie Maude Lena Gordon's Vision of Afro-Asian Solidarity', *ibid.*, 179–97. See the following paragraph for a discussion of the global dimensions of these scholars' wider work.

⁸ See for example Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895–1945* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Carole Elaine Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge, 2003); Keisha Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia,

Shilliam, Imaobong Umoren and Keisha Blain have examined the entangled, multipolar networks of women and men from both North and South: that of Black Power, Rastafari, Maori and Pasifika activists in Shilliam's case, that of Black Americans, Martinicans and Jamaicans in Umoren's case, and that of pan-Africanists from America, Jamaica and Britain in Blain's case.⁹

Moving away from histories of great men and interstate relations, a good number of scholars have turned their attention to the practice of internationalism in recent years, focusing on the history of liberal international institutions and beyond, including the League of Nations, the United Nations, UNESCO, the Socialist International, as well as humanitarian organisations including Oxfam and Save the Children.¹⁰ Scholars in the past ten years have unravelled the imperial roots of liberal internationalist projects.¹¹ They have also shown us how institutions like the League and the United Nations served as important anti-colonial platforms for Arab and Asian political organisers, including women.¹² Some have shown us how actors in colonial and post-colonial territories interacted and appealed to such institutions – as

2018); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Nicholas Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945–1960* (Chapel Hill, 2017); Keisha N. Blain and Tiffany M. Gill (eds.), *To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* (Champaign, 2019).

⁹ See Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (2015); Imaobong Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists: Activist-Intellectuals and Global Freedom Struggles* (Berkeley, 2018); and Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 133–216.

¹⁰ Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, 'New Histories of the United Nations', *Journal of World History*, 19, no. 3 (2008), 251–74; Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity* (Ithaca, 2011); Ana Antic, Johanna Conterio and Dora Vargha, 'Conclusion: Beyond Liberal Internationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 25 (2016), 359–71; Kevin O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid* (Cambridge, 2021); Giusi Russo, *Women, Empires, and Body Politics at the United Nations, 1946–1975* (Lincoln, NE, 2023). For new perspectives on socialist internationalism, see Talbot Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914–1960* (Oxford, 2017); James Mark et al., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford, 2022); Celia Donert and Christine Moll-Murata (eds.), 'Special Issue 30: Women's Rights and Global Socialism', *International Review of Social History*, 67 (2022).

¹¹ See especially Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015).

¹² Manu Baghavan, *The Peacemakers: India and the Quest for One World* (2013); Nova Robinson, "'Sisters in Asia": The League of Nations and Feminist Anticolonial Internationalism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 47 (2022), 987–1012; Nova Robinson, "'Arab Internationalism and Gender: Perspectives from the Third Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 1949', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49 (2016), 578–83; Cindy Ewing, "'With a Minimum of Bitterness": Decolonization, the Right to Self-Determination, and the Arab-Asian Group', *Journal of Global History*, 17 (2022), 254–71; Elisabeth Leake, 'States, Nations, and Self-Determination: Afghanistan and Decolonization at the United Nations', *Journal of Global History*, 17 (2022), 272–91; Alanna O'Malley and Vineet Thakur, 'Introduction: Shaping a Global Horizon, New Histories of the Global South and the UN', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 13 (2022), 55–65; Emma Kluge, 'A New Agenda for the Global South: West Papua, the United Nations, and the Politics of Decolonization', *ibid.*, 66–85; Stella Krepp, 'Fighting an Illiberal World Order: The Latin American Road to Unctad, 1948–1964', *ibid.*, 86–103; and Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and

Erez Manela demonstrated in his landmark study of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, an occasion seized upon by petitioners from Korea, Egypt, India and China to articulate their own nationalist aims.¹³

The locations of anti-colonial interwar internationalism spearheaded by Asians, Africans and, in some cases, Latin Americans have often been traced to urban hubs like London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, New York, San Francisco and Moscow.¹⁴ As hubs for education, intellectual ferment and migrant crossings, these were important sites for anti-colonial activists to form networks due to the necessity of evading colonial regimes of surveillance.¹⁵ None of us can ignore the importance of these cities, particularly for the revolutionary heroes and political leaders of the Global South. But this might lead us to ask: to what extent do such histories place nationalist elites and leading intellectuals who studied and moved through Europe at the centre of the story of the Global South's internationalism? What does internationalism look like when it emerges *in* and *for* the Global South?¹⁶

Sujit Sivasundaram has challenged us to rethink the age of revolutions from the point of view of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and to look at the ways in which indigenous peoples travelled, migrated, adopted new technologies, recalibrated their politics and challenged the crushing force of empires.¹⁷ Toby Green, similarly, has traced the intricate globalism of West African societies, which both inspired and took inspiration from the Haitian Revolution through technology and music, and where itinerant Islamic scholars helped push popular resistance movements to overthrow aristocracies made wealthy

José Pedro Monteiro, "'Colonialism on Trial': International and Transnational Organizations and the "Global South" Challenges to the Portuguese Empire (1949–1962)', *ibid.*, 104–26.

¹³ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Boston, 2007); Meredith Terretta, "'We Had Been Fooled into Thinking that the UN Watches over the Entire World": Human Rights, UN Trust Territories, and Africa's Decolonization', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34 (2012), 329.

¹⁴ See for example Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC, 2007); Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the "World Forces": Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), 325–44; Frederik Petersson, 'Hub of the Anti-imperialist Movement: The League Against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933', *Interventions*, 16 (2014), 49–71; Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 2015); Michael Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis* (Cambridge, 2015); Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below* (2015); Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia: Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement* (Copenhagen, 2019). On a fascinating revolutionary circuit that connects San Francisco/Berkeley from Bengal to London, Paris and Berlin to Istanbul, Kabul and Singapore see Maya Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, 2011).

¹⁵ Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905–1945* (Oxford, 2017).

¹⁶ Emma Hunter's illuminating study shows how concepts such as international human rights and democracy were translated and debated in both urban and rural Tanzania. See Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania* (Cambridge, 2015).

¹⁷ Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (Chicago, 2021).

through the slave trade.¹⁸ Haiti would go on to serve as an early model of pan-African unity that would inspire a turn-of-the-century movement of African American and African intellectuals.¹⁹ Scholars have recently argued that nineteenth-century Latin America, long neglected in scholarship on 'global history' and the history of international relations, is central to understanding the rise of the nation state and provided lessons in successful multilateralism.²⁰ By the early twentieth century, another era of revolutionary change, newspaper readers, radio listeners, community organisers and ordinary neighbours throughout Southeast Asia were moved by the great revolutions of the age: the Meiji Restoration, the Philippine Revolution, the Khalifate movement and the birth of the Republic of China.²¹ This is not to discount the importance of 1919 for instilling a revolutionary rhetoric of self-determination in the international arena, but it does give us different lineages of the global circulation of revolutionary and internationalist ideas rooted in the Global South.

By beginning with events in the Global South, a different landscape of international engagement emerges, one that accounts for but also moves beyond developments in Europe and North America. Edited volumes and monographs that combine a range of regional perspectives are beginning to chart the multi-centred rise of various kinds of internationalism around the world – from globalist associational cultures to the worldwide rise of radical anti-fascism to underground revolutionary networks across Asia and the Pacific.²² We might also ask whether older lineages of cosmopolitanism – mentalities on which internationalism depends – dovetailed with the engagement of interwar internationalism by people from, for instance, the coastal regions of East Africa and South and Southeast Asia (more broadly, the Indian Ocean world). These regions were knitted together – and to the world – by networks of trade and communication well before the twentieth century.²³ In Southeast Asia,

¹⁸ Toby Green, *Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (2019).

¹⁹ See Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (2018); and Leslie M. Alexander, *Fear of a Black Republic* (Champaign, 2022).

²⁰ See Matthew Brown, 'The Global History of Latin America', *Journal of Global History*, 10 (2015), 378; Tom Long and Carsten-Andreas Schulz, 'Republican Internationalism: The Nineteenth-Century Roots of Latin American Contributions to International Order', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 35 (2022), 639–61. See also Nicola Miller, *Republics of Knowledge* (Princeton, 2020); Mark J. Petersen, *The Southern Cone and the Origins of Pan America, 1888–1933* (Notre Dame, 2022).

²¹ See Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination* (2005); Amira Bennison, 'Muslim Internationalism between Empire and Nation-State', in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, ed. Abigail Green and Vincent Viane (2012), 163–85; Nicole CuUnjieng-Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino-Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution* (New York, 2022).

²² Andrew Arsan, Su Lin Lewis and Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment', *Journal of Global History*, 7 (2012), 157–65; Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey and David J. Featherstone (eds.), *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (Oxford, 2020); Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Boston, 2021).

²³ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge, 1985); Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (2010); Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

long before London boasted of its multiculturalism, colonial port-cities like Penang and Rangoon were dotted with mosques, Buddhist temples, Hindu shrines, churches, and synagogues; these had precedents in pre-colonial cities such as Malacca and Ayutthaya in Siam, which welcomed a range of confessional groups, practising religious tolerance.²⁴ One did not have to travel to Europe to be an internationalist; the sense of other worlds, other communities was palatable and felt in these microcosms. Whether cosmopolitanism was a vernacular practice or an elitist claim, its presence was a fact of life.²⁵

In multilingual Penang of the 1920s (whose population had long included Malays, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Armenians, Eurasians), when schoolchildren heard of the League of Nations, they jokingly compared the institution to their own multi-ethnic friendship circles.²⁶ Penang's newspaper correspondents debated the merits of such an institution, and wondered whether Asia deserved its own League, particularly given the failures of that organisation to live up to its promises.²⁷ Some of these correspondents had gone to mission schools, and many to the Penang Free School, established in 1816 by an English clergyman and Chinese, Tamil, Chulia and Eurasian merchants who agreed to build a school open to pupils of any race, colour and creed. Their educational world was one steeped in liberal traditions, but also one where, in the playground, Chinese, Indian, Malay, Arab and Peranakan vernacular cultures melded, jostled and refracted in kaleidoscopic views of the wider world.²⁸ One graduate, the renowned epidemiologist Wu Lien-Teh, served as an early adviser to the League of Nations, earned a nomination for the 1935 Nobel Prize and pioneered the use of facemasks, later to prove essential in controlling the COVID-19 epidemic around the world.²⁹ Penang's multilingual literati practised, and advocated for, the cosmopolitanism that would be heralded by institutions like the UN that espoused world peace, world community and interracial cooperation (see Figure 1). But they were also highly conscious of the contradictions at the heart of the liberal international project.

Discourses of internationalism coursed through Penang's interwar press, including the *Eastern Courier*, a Kuomintang-financed newspaper featuring regular contributions from multi-ethnic Malayan intellectuals. A 1929 article on 'World Brotherhood' pointed to the cleavages between the 'so-called progressive and advanced nations of the world and the so-called backward races

²⁴ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, vol. 1: *The Lands Below the Wind* (New Haven, 1988).

²⁵ Scholarship on the eastern Mediterranean has made us particularly attuned to the dangers of romanticising the cosmopolitanism of these areas, while giving us a more careful reading of its practice and its politics. See Will Hanley, 'Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies', *History Compass*, 6 (2008), 1346-67.

²⁶ 'The Consequences of a Visit to a Lecture', *Penang Free School Magazine*, Dec. 1921, p. 10.

²⁷ 'World's Greatest Need: A World League', *Eastern Courier*, 13 Apr. 1929, p. 3.

²⁸ Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, 2018), 196-201.

²⁹ Wu Yu-Lin, *Memories of Dr. Wu Lien-Teh: Plague Fighter* (George Town, 2016); Anoushka Bucktowar, Hareesha Bharadwaj and Matan Bone, 'Lest We Forget: Dr Wu Lien-Teh (1879-1960)', *Journal of Medical Biography* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/09677720231177679>.



Figure 1. Newspaper cuttings from 1930s Penang from the *Eastern Courier* and the *Straits Echo*.

of mankind, for the so-called superior races have always assumed that they are in command of the resources of the world and it is for them to take or give as they see fit.³⁰ The idea of ‘world brotherhood’ relied on friendship and cooperation among equals, and the need for nations to give up ‘special privileges, concessions, and territories taken by force’. It relied on young men and women now capable of speaking almost any language ‘not excepting Esperanto’, who would ‘do much to enhance the cordial relations between China and foreign countries, for after all, they are composed of living human beings to whom the appeal of internationalism is as irresistible as it is natural’. It relied, the author argued, on more student exchanges and visits of foreign journalists – all marks of international cooperation in the post-war world. This, however, was an ideal that was far from realisation, particularly given what the author saw as the ‘treatment meted out to colored people in the Southern part of the United States’. The ideals of international cooperation advocated throughout the 1920s by America and Northern Europe were betrayed by their imperialism, and the treatment of those on the other side of the global colour line.³¹

³⁰ ‘World Brotherhood’, *Eastern Courier*, 8 Jun. 1929. The China orientation of the article suggests the author was Straits-Chinese, though the tone is a clear departure from the turn-of-the-century imperial cosmopolitanism of Singapore’s Straits-Chinese; on this see Neil Khor ‘Imperial Cosmopolitan Malaya: A Study of Realist Fiction in the Straits Chinese Magazine’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 81, no. 1 (2008), 27–47; Tim Harper, ‘Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore’, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 12 (1997), 261–92. Rather, it exhibits a strong sense of global social justice characteristic of Penang’s multi-ethnic literati by the 1930s; on this see Lewis, *Cities in Motion*.

³¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903] (New York, 1982), 54; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne, 2008).

The view of internationalism from the South relied on the promise of a post-colonial world, in which each nation, each community, deserved its own seat at the table (even if many would disagree on *how* communities should be represented).³² The League never promised this. It was after the failures of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that anti-colonial movements grew increasingly dynamic, militant and resolutely internationalist, campaigning for an end to colonialism everywhere, feeding off each other, creating new (and reviving old) solidarities that lasted well into the post-war era.³³ The League Against Imperialism, which met in Brussels in 1927, drew together leftist internationalists and students, radicals and anti-colonial revolutionaries from across the colonial world.³⁴ These solidarities overlapped with leftist internationalism, which held that the struggle against colonialism was intimately bound up with the struggle against capitalism – and that both needed to be overthrown for a truly egalitarian world order to emerge. As Tim Harper has detailed so vividly, the suppression of the Indonesian communist movement in 1926, the tightening of surveillance networks followed by waves of exile throughout Asia, and the subsequent slaughtering of communists by Kuomintang officers in Shanghai in 1927, caused irreparable ruptures in what was, briefly, a united movement, and crippled the vibrant, anti-colonial leftist internationalism of the 1920s.³⁵

Women's internationalist networks also began to flourish in the interwar era, as Asian women directly challenged the Eurocentrism of Western women's movements. The Pan-Pacific Women's Conference, convened in 1928 in Honolulu, put non-white women from China, Japan, the Pacific Islands and settler colonies into leadership roles.³⁶ Three years later, Indian women organised an All-Asian Women's Conference in Lahore to create a shared forum in which Asian women could converse among themselves to learn from each other, and distinguish themselves from the so-called 'international' and transnational

³² On claims for self-determination within post-colonial states, see Lydia Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making', *Past & Present*, 242 (2019), 227–64; Emma Kluge, 'A New Agenda for the Global South: West Papua, the United Nations, and the Politics of Decolonization', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 13 (2022), 66–85.

³³ See Michael Adas, 'Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology', *Journal of World History*, 15 (2004), 31–63; Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asianist Thought* (New York, 2007); Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds.), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (New Delhi, 2014). Some militant anti-colonial movements can of course be traced earlier, amidst the First World War. See Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; and Tim Harper, 'Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (2013), 1782–1811.

³⁴ Michele Louro et al., *The League Against Imperialism* (Leiden, 2020).

³⁵ Harper, *Underground Asia*.

³⁶ Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu, 2009); Rumi Yasutake, 'The First Wave of International Women's Movements from a Japanese Perspective: Western Outreach and Japanese Women Activists during the Interwar Years', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009), 13–20.

networks dominated by European feminists.³⁷ It aimed for a radical break with European feminism, in full recognition of the distinct and anti-colonial context in which Asian women campaigned. Attendees at the conference included the sisters of the pioneering Indonesian feminist and nationalist Raden Adjeng Kartini, while one of the conference's reception committee, Hansa Mehta, became instrumental in the drafting of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The end of World War II is often seen as the beginning of a new world order shaped largely by American and European officials. But a more nuanced perspective suggests more agency by actors in the Global South, and more continuity with its earlier aspirations. Christy Thornton has shown how prevailing accounts of the making of this new institutional order have neglected the role of Latin American officials in the early foundations of the Bretton Woods project.³⁸ The 1940s saw a range of experiments in federalism that disrupted the teleology of nationhood, some driven by a much-weakened Whitehall and taken up by African and Asian leaders, and some conceived independently.³⁹ Many of these had long roots: the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester was the fifth in a series of gatherings that began in 1919 as an alternative forum to the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁰ Nehru's vision of a pan-Asian federation paved the way for the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, a legacy of Asia's interwar internationalism.⁴¹ For Asian and African leaders and leaders-in-waiting, the United Nations provided the institutional scaffolding to actualise anti-colonial aspirations already in place, as they began forming new solidarities and conversing about the shape of a post-imperial world both in and out of liberal institutional institutions.⁴²

From Japan's insertion of a 'race equality clause' at the dawn of the League of Nations in 1919, Asian, African and Latin American diplomats and technocrats both drove and contested international norms; these ranged from the advocacy of Latin American and Indian women in making the UN Declaration of Human Rights a more inclusive document, to the role of Nehru, Indian migrants in South Africa, and Tibetan and Pakistani refugees

³⁷ *Report of the All-Asian Women's Conference* (Bombay, 1931); Sumita Mukherjee, 'The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian Women and Their Leadership of a Pan-Asian Feminist Organisation', *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017), 361–81; Shobna Nijhawan, 'International Feminism from an Asian Center: The All-Asian Women's Conference (Lahore, 1931) as a Transnational Feminist Moment', *Journal of Women's History*, 29 (2017), 12–36; on the pan-Asian legacies of the conference see Carolien Stolte, "'The Asiatic Hour': New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947", in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War*, ed. Natasa Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boskowska (2014), 57–75.

³⁸ Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Berkeley, 2021).

³⁹ See Michael Collins, 'Decolonisation and the "Federal Moment"', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 24 (2013), 21–40.

⁴⁰ See Adi, *Pan-Africanism*; Jake Hodder, 'The Elusive History of the Pan-African Congress, 1919–27', *History Workshop Journal*, 91 (2021), 113–31.

⁴¹ See Stolte, "'The Asiatic Hour'"; Vineet Thakur, 'An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947', *International History Review*, 41 (2019), 673–95.

⁴² See Christopher J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Columbus, 2010).

in India in remaking discourses around citizenship and human rights.⁴³ Although these efforts were not always successful, their campaigns shifted the hegemonic dynamic of these international arenas and forced powerful nations into significant compromises to achieve consensus.⁴⁴ Adom Getachew has shown how African and Caribbean leaders used institutions like the United Nations and the World Bank to put the needs of the post-colonial world front and centre of the new world order.⁴⁵ These were sites of pragmatic institutional change and coalition-building – and not always successful. As the United Nations saw an exponential increase in membership with the entry of new post-colonial states from Asia and Africa, a Non-Aligned Bloc formed to challenge the supremacy of countries in the Global North, encapsulated by the hierarchies present in the UN's five-member, veto-wielding Security Council. By 1974, the New International Economic Order, a set of proposals to end the dependency of the Global South on the Global North, offered an indicator both of the ambitions of the Non-Aligned movement and the limited capacity of the United Nations to realise them, as well as the collapse of leftist internationalism in the latter half of the cold war.⁴⁶

Yet the United Nations and other multilateral institutions were not the only platforms for actors from the Global South to reimagine the world. The cultivation of a developmental perspective focusing on the needs and imagined futures of the Global South stemmed, too, from alternative forums of South–South cooperation centred in the South. The Non-Aligned movement emerged from connections and conversations – filled with hope and solidarity as well as tension and division – held before, during and after the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, which carries a symbolic meaning lingering well into the twenty-first century.⁴⁷ While it has long been seen as the inaugural moment of Third World internationalism – and indeed non-alignment – in the Global South, it has also elided wider and more diverse histories of internationalism, some splintered along these lines. Apart from new leaders – Nehru, Nasser, U Nu and Sukarno – who thrived in new diplomatic arenas such as Bandung's, trade unionists, women, peace activists, religious groups, intellectuals and artists were also part of this moment of post-colonial world-making across the South, meeting at pan-Asian, pan-African, Afro-Asian and

⁴³ On the race equality clause, see Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (2009); Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009); Ria Kapoor, *Making Refugees in India* (Oxford, 2021).

⁴⁴ See Susan Pedersen, 'Getting Out of Iraq – in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood', *The American Historical Review*, 115 (2010), 975–1000.

⁴⁵ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire* (Princeton, 2019); Thornton, *Revolution in Development*.

⁴⁶ 'Special Issue: Towards a History of the New International Economic Order', *Humanity*, 6, no. 1 (2005).

⁴⁷ See G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (1966); Christopher J. Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, GA, 2010); Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (2014), 225–52.

Tricontinental conferences across the South.⁴⁸ Before and after Bandung, these conferences had already begun assembling people of all ages, beliefs, professions and communities under the banner of diverse internationalisms. Delhi emerged as a hub of the Asian peace movement; Cairo as the site of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity movement; and Beijing as a bastion of socialist hospitality for leftist internationals worldwide.⁴⁹ Afro-Asian women's conferences in Colombo and Cairo centred women in the early history of development, debating issues around women's education, public health and labour, as well as imperial pretensions of foreign aid.⁵⁰ Colombo became the headquarters of the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau (AAWB) from 1958, while Jakarta hosted the Afro-Asian Journalists' Association (AAJA) from 1963 (both organisations split in the wake of Sino-Soviet tensions and political differences among members, one branch relocating to Beijing from 1966, while another branch of the AAWB relocated to Cairo).⁵¹ As with so many of the Afro-Asian projects of this period, both organisations grew from conferences: the AAJA from Bandung, and the AAWB from the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent, which not only served as a bridge between the Soviet Union and the Afro-Asian world, but between Asian and African writers seeking to radically transform the realm of literature into a truly global project.⁵²

Conferences, as Stephen Legg and others remind us, served as one of the key locations where internationalism emerged in the post-war world, 'buzzing with life, potential futures, hope, and despair'.⁵³ In place of London, Geneva and

⁴⁸ See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2007); Elisabeth Armstrong, 'Before Bandung: The Anti-imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41 (2016), 305–31; Katharine McGregor and Vanessa Hearman, 'Challenging the Lifeline of Imperialism: Reassessing Afro-Asian Solidarity and Related Activism in the Decade 1955–1965', in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Past and Pending Futures* (Cambridge, 2017); Carolien Stolte, 'Special Issue: Trade Union Networks and the Politics of Expertise in an Age of Afro-Asian Solidarity', *Journal of Social History*, 53 (2019), 331–47; Carolien Stolte and Su Lin Lewis (eds.), *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism* (Leiden, 2022); Wildan Sena Utama, 'Engineering Solidarity: Indonesia, Afro-Asian Networks, and Third World Anti-imperialism 1950s–1960s' (PhD dissertation, University of Bristol, submitted Jun. 2023).

⁴⁹ Carolien Stolte, 'The People's Bandung', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 125–56; Reem Abou-El-Fadl, 'Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub', *ibid.*, 157–92; Rachel Leow, 'A Missing Peace', *ibid.*, 21–54.

⁵⁰ See Su Lin Lewis and Wildan Sena Utama, 'The Politics of Development at Afro-Asian Women's Conferences', in *Socialism, Development, and Internationalism in the Third World: Envisioning Modernity in the Era of Decolonisation*, ed. Su Lin Lewis and Nana Osei-Opare (forthcoming in 2024).

⁵¹ Taomo Zhou, 'Global Reporting from the Third World: The Afro-Asian Journalists' Association, 1963–1974', *Critical Asian Studies*, 51 (2019), 166–97; Duncan M. Yoon, "'Our Forces Have Redoubled": World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 2 (2015), 233–52.

⁵² See in particular Hanna Jansen, 'Soviet "Afro-Asians" in UNESCO: Reorienting World History', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 193–222. On the Tashkent Afro-Asian Writers' Conference see also Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal, 2020).

⁵³ Stephen Legg et al. (eds.), *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World* (2022).

New York, the new sites of Third World internationalism emerged in Bandung, Delhi, Beijing, Rangoon, Cairo, Tashkent and Havana.⁵⁴ New state-owned airlines, such as Air India and Egyptian Air, ferried Asian and African intellectuals across the Afro-Asian world. Delegates visited the emerging cities of the Global South via short hops along Southern air routes. Some were veterans of these worlds, like W. E. B. Du Bois, who had attended the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 at the age of thirty-two; the confiscation of his passport barred him from attending the Bandung conference, but after its reinstatement, he toured Europe and the Soviet Union and attended the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference at the age of ninety. Attendees learned as much about internationalism and its limits from conference exchanges as they did from the action of crossing borders at the pace of a jet airliner, or the new realities of passports, borders and visa restrictions.⁵⁵ Both the growing pace of and material restrictions on travel were mirrored in the realm of international communications, as activists both took advantage of the increased pace of communications and challenged the continuing dominance of American and European information networks.⁵⁶

Bandung was thus part of a multi-centred arc of conferences and organisations that formed the sites of South–South cooperation in the 1950s, characterised by various kinds of internationalism splintered in an atmosphere of cold war competition. If Afro-Asianism was one form of collaboration, so were pan-Asianism, pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism – and so was Tricontinentalism, which grew out of these earlier movements, entwining Asia and Africa with Latin America in 1966.⁵⁷ Regionalisms were also internationalisms, bringing together people across the new and emerging states of the post-colonial world to meet, often for the very first time. But conferences were only one form of mobilisation in the Global South. The Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon was not only an event, but an organisation that shared its offices with the Burma Socialist Party, serving as a publishing house with a Ghanaian editor who covered anti-colonial movements across Asia and Africa.⁵⁸ The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), headquartered in Cairo, constituted a sophisticated organisational structure composed of a permanent secretariat, a council, a finance committee and various national Afro-Asian solidarity organisations.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Stolte and Lewis (eds.), *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism*.

⁵⁵ Su Lin Lewis, 'Skies That Bind: Air Travel in the Bandung Era', in *Placing Internationalism*, ed. Legg et al., 234–51

⁵⁶ See Sarah Nelson, 'A Dream Deferred: UNESCO, American Expertise, and the Eclipse of Radical News Development in the Early Satellite Age', *Radical History Review*, 141 (2021), 30–59.

⁵⁷ See Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transcontinental Solidarity* (Durham, NC, 2018); *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*, ed. R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence (Cambridge, 2022).

⁵⁸ On James Markham, the Ghanaian editor of the Anti-Colonial Bureau in Rangoon, see Gerard McCann, 'Where Was the Afro in Afro-Asian Solidarity? Africa's "Bandung Moment" in 1950s Asia', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 89–124.

⁵⁹ 'The Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization from April 1960–April 1961', 15 Jun. 1961, CIA-RDP78-00915R001300050009-3, CREST, 21, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R001300050007-5.pdf>. See also Utama, 'Engineering Solidarity'.

After 1966, AAPSO merged into the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, publishing its first bulletin shortly thereafter. Militant anti-colonial and intellectual networks brought revolutionaries to Cairo, Algiers, Dar es Salaam and Angola, the new hubs of revolutionary, anti-colonial internationalism across the African continent, throughout the 1960s.⁶⁰ London in the 1960s reprised its role as an anti-colonial hub, cultivating overlapping networks of pro-Palestinian, anti-apartheid and anti-war activists, while Beijing and Moscow continued to strengthen their ties across the Afro-Asian world.

While recognising the importance of the UN and other multilateral forums for actors from the Global South, we must also recognise that such institutions were not the only platforms for change: South–South forums provided parallel and often formative arenas of internationalism for transnational actors, including those whose careers intersected with the UN. Civil society actors who moved in and out of UN commissions, projects and events brought with them the networks, knowledge and experiences drawn from such forums. Moreover, as I have shown, South–South forums provided an alternative arena of internationalism, as important as, if not more important than, conventional international forums. They were filled both with activists who appealed to the norms of international solidarity and human rights enshrined at the UN, and others who avoided and distrusted the UN and other humanitarian organisations. All these groups operated transnationally – through peace movements, women’s movements, students’ movements, labour movements, consumers’ associations and environmental movements – while maintaining strong grass-roots networks both within and outside the new urban metropolises of the Global South.

Deeper and participatory histories

Conventional methodologies of international history are insufficient to account for deeper, entangled histories of actors from the Global South both within *and* outside international institutions. Much of the recent history of internationalism has mined the archives of the United Nations and other internationalist and humanitarian institutions, as well as the private papers of internationalist thinkers in the Global North, often kept in publicly accessible archives and libraries. The archives of humanitarian organisations often tell us much about Western ‘agents of internationalism’, but we must look hard for the interlocutors who made their work possible, and we understand little about their lives.⁶¹ Alanna O’Malley and Vineet Thakur have recently drawn

⁶⁰ See Meredith Terretta, ‘Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global: From Forest Maquis to a PanAfrican Accra’, *Journal of African History*, 51 (2010), 189–212; Jeffrey Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford, 2016); Eric Burton, ‘Hubs of Decolonization: African Liberation Movements and “Eastern” Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam’, in *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War ‘East’: Transnational Activism 1960–1990* (Berlin, 2019); George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam* (Cambridge, 2021).

⁶¹ See Jessica Reinisch, ‘Introduction: Agents of Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 25 (2016), 195–205.

attention to the marginalisation of Global South actors in the United Nations, who have long populated the institution while seeking to transform it, ‘working through the constraints of power rather than negating it’.⁶² These might include not only U Thant, its third secretary general, but also the young diplomats conversing in the halls of the UN’s New York headquarters – as well as the Asian, African and Latin American doctors, engineers, technicians, humanitarians and peacekeepers working in its umbrella organisations. The interactions they had were collaborative and constructive as well as contested and hierarchical; it is for this reason that we must approach these relationships without the romanticisation that can often accompany Afro-Asian solidarity and the Global South, but with careful attention to their aims and ambitions, their successes and failures, and their own prejudices.⁶³ Antoinette Burton’s examination of India’s relationship with Africa exposes a complex historical relationship imbued with hierarchies of race and gender, one shaped by dynamics of colonial and post-colonial power.⁶⁴ As Margot Tudor shows, vocal Iranian anti-colonialists in the UN’s General Assembly could display the same sense of racial hierarchy as their Western counterparts in UN peacekeeping missions.⁶⁵ Being from the Global South was not in and of itself indicative of anti-colonial or radical politics.⁶⁶

The archives of the United Nations and its associate institutions do tell us about how particular actors from the Global South – often elite or middle-class technocrats – used such forums. They may reveal much about the United Nations as a platform for South–South organising and coalition-building – and also contests and tensions – in the making of the Global South in the international arena. But they often don’t tell us about the domestic pressures faced by Asian, African and Latin American actors who employed the UN as a site of contestation and campaigning. They don’t tell us of the accusations they might have faced at home – of being elitist, rootless and out-of-touch cosmopolitans. They don’t tell us about the tensions between internationalist technocrats and those activists operating transnationally outside liberal international institutions. They don’t fully capture the way actors from the Global South had to navigate a thorny labyrinth of interpersonal relationships at the local, national, institutional and international levels, amid persistent racism rooted in deep-seated colonial legacies.⁶⁷

⁶² O’Malley and Thakur, ‘Introduction: Shaping a Global Horizon’, 57.

⁶³ See Schneider, ‘Between Promise and Skepticism’; Pamila Gupta *et al.* (eds.), ‘Special Issue: The Global South: Histories, Politics, Maps’, *Radical History Review*, 131 (2018).

⁶⁴ Antoinette Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation* (Durham, NC, 2016).

⁶⁵ Margot Tudor, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: United Nations Peacekeeping and the Reinvention of Colonialism, 1945–1971* (Cambridge, 2023).

⁶⁶ I thank Margot Tudor for adding this point.

⁶⁷ One only needs to look at the recent comment by a Romanian ambassador, comparing a monkey that interrupted a UN meeting to the African delegation, to see contemporary examples of this: ‘Dragos Tigau: Romania Recalls Kenya Ambassador over Racist Monkey Slur’, BBC, 10 Jun. 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65867104>.

The Asian Socialist Conference (ASC) – particularly its Indonesian members – provides a complex picture of the interplay between different kinds of internationalism and its legacies for ensuing generations of activists. It also provides a starting point to examine the difficulties in tracing these histories both in and out of international archives, particularly for scholars in the Global South. The organisation served as a home to Asian and African socialist internationalists who operated in multiple internationalist spaces.⁶⁸ Many were multilingual, urban cosmopolitans, and worked alongside, and in tension with, socialists active at the grass roots. Some of them knew the UN well: Sutan Sjahrir, the leader of Indonesia's Socialist Party, confidently addressed its Security Council in 1947 at Lake Success over the issue of Indonesian independence, drawing links to other anti-colonial movements elsewhere. The organisation's Burmese head, U Hla Aung, travelled to Central Africa and the Gold Coast before arriving at the UN General Assembly to deliver a fiery speech on the persistence of colonialism on the continent; Wijono, the ASC's secretary general, forged networks of socialists in Malaya as well as in North Vietnam, railing against European socialists at the Stockholm Congress of the Socialist International. Drawing on the networks they forged across the Global South, these representatives campaigned vigorously against continued imperialism and for the need to de-escalate cold war tensions through disarmament and allegiance to UN principles.

One of the junior members of Sjahrir's Socialist Party, Soedjatmoko, was with Sjahrir at the Lake Success meeting; like Sjahrir, he had been at Delhi's Asian Relations Conference, and he even named his daughter Kamala after Nehru's wife. He also attended the ASC (on which he commented extensively in the Indonesian press) and served with the Indonesian delegation at Bandung. He developed a career in internationalism, staying on after Lake Success to become Indonesia's representative to the UN until 1950, and forming working relationships with other Asian and African diplomats and intellectuals in the world of public policy and international development. He witnessed the development of the Non-Aligned movement, while engaging in multiple regional and international forums on history, culture, social justice and equitable development in Southeast Asia and the wider world. He wrote on the primacy of freedom in development almost twenty years before Amartya Sen's Nobel-winning book.⁶⁹ He became, in 1982, the rector of the UN's university in Tokyo. That year, he also returned to Delhi – the city where he had attended the 1947 Asian Relations Conference – to give the Nehru Memorial Lecture on 'Non-Alignment and Beyond', expressing the need for regional cooperation and interdependence among developing and underdeveloped nations, and the history of non-alignment as a driving force for global solidarity.⁷⁰ For

⁶⁸ Su Lin Lewis, 'Asian Socialism and the Forgotten Architects of Post-colonial Freedom', *Journal of World History*, 30 (2019), 55–88; Thomas Shillam, 'Socialist Internationalism in South and Southeast Asia, c.1947–1960' (PhD dissertation, University of York, 2021).

⁶⁹ Soedjatmoko, *Development and Freedom* (Tokyo, 1980).

⁷⁰ Soedjatmoko, 'Non-Alignment and Beyond', in *Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lectures*, II (New Delhi, 1998), 1–29.

Soedjatmoko, the early South–South forums and conferences which he attended as a young man were formative platforms to work out developmental priorities and non-aligned pathways for participants across the Global South, even before he arrived in the hallowed halls of the UN.

Working alongside Soejatmoko in the Indonesian Socialist Party was a circle of grass-roots socialists rooted in East Java, in close touch with trade unions and oil workers, led by the veteran activist, journalist and labour mobiliser Djohan Sjahroezah.⁷¹ They too had attended the ASC alongside Sjahrir, with some, like Dayino, staying as Indonesia's representatives.⁷² While Soedjatmoko operated in liberal internationalist circles, urging them to understand development priorities from the ground up, Dayino worked at the grass-roots level, maintaining close ties with members of the Indonesian Communist Party even as socialists outwardly distanced themselves from its more 'aligned' stance. Despite their differences in strategy, he would remain close to Soedjatmoko until he died.

Their commitment to international activism was carried forth by their children. Soedjatmoko's daughter, Kamala Chandrakirana, studied rural sociology and Southeast Asian studies with Benedict Anderson at Cornell, returned to Indonesia to begin a career with international aid organisations and national organisations and worked with grass-roots institutions in Papua.⁷³ She later became a prominent leader in both the Indonesian and international women's movement, including at the UN, focusing on human rights and discrimination against women. Dayino's daughter, Ita Fatia Nadia, also became a leading activist, inspired by her parents' activism.⁷⁴ She joined the Asian Students Association in the late 1970s and became part of a network of underground student movements throughout Asia that campaigned against the authoritarian regimes led by Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia and Mohammed Mahatir in Malaysia. She was inspired by Gabriela, a powerful umbrella organisation of Filipina women's groups founded in 1984.⁷⁵ Ita and Kamala worked together at the Asia-Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD), a network of feminist organisations that met initially at the 1985 Nairobi Conference, where 12,000 non-governmental organisation (NGO) members including lawyers, activists and academics from the Global South came together to critically review the achievements of the UN Decade for Women. Amid the onset of World Bank and International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies that negatively impacted women's traditional livelihoods and further centralised state power, resulting in a constriction of democratic space, a network of women lawyers, activists and social scientists

⁷¹ Riadi Ngasiran, *Kesabaran Revolusioner: Djohan Sjahroezah: Pejuang Kemerdekaan Bawah Tanah* (Jakarta, 2015), 243–6; J. D. Legge, *Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia: A Study of the Following Recruited by Sutan Sjahrir in Occupied Jakarta* (Jakarta, 2010), 100.

⁷² Ngasiran, *Kesabaran Revolusioner*, 251–2.

⁷³ Kamala Chandrakirana, interview by author, 4 Jul. 2023.

⁷⁴ Ita F. Nadia, interview by author, 27 Sep. 2021.

⁷⁵ See Mina Roces, 'Rethinking "the Filipino Woman": A Century of Women's Activism in the Philippines, 1905–2006', in *Women's Movements in Asia*, ed. Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (Abingdon, 2010).

in the APWLD focused on legislating for women's interests and mobilising women in campaigns for women's rights.⁷⁶

It is notable that both Kamala and Ita have been active participants in women's movements in the Global South – particularly as this, along with the activism of their fathers, is part of the lineage that Kamala and Ita come from. Much of what I have described above – the challenge to Eurocentric views of internationalism, the rise of South–South forums, the interplay between organisations from the Global South and those from the Global North, and the UN as a platform for South–South connection – will long be recognised by historians of women's internationalism and transnational organising.⁷⁷ Some of the most important histories of the international women's movement from the 1970s onwards have been written by women from the Global South as a mode of documenting their activism and the history of their transnational organisations. These have been sidelined in a history of internationalism that has long prioritised intergovernmental and state archives, and a history of development that has long neglected the role of women.

These include not only the history of the APWLD but the history of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), another organisation in which both Ita and Kamala have been involved. Like the APWLD, it was formed as part of a series of international conferences around the UN Decade for Women in 1985 as a forum for women from the Global South to share experiences and strategies around alternative development processes. DAWN's secretariat has rotated from Bangalore to Rio de Janeiro to Barbados and Fiji, to Nigeria, the Philippines and Thailand. Economist and activist Devaki Jain's account of the organisation, written as part of a UN intellectual history project, is emblematic of a history of development as viewed from the South, and the role of women's civil society networks in enriching the UN's work.⁷⁸ Gita Sen and Caren Grown's book on the organisation was written immediately before the 1985 Nairobi UN women's conference.⁷⁹ It called attention to DAWN as a project 'initiated in the Third World' that nonetheless had support from women's movements in more industrialised countries, while also attracting 'the interests of many oppressed and poor women there, who see in

⁷⁶ Judy Taguiwalo and Trimita Chakma, *APWLD: Herstory 1986–2017* (Chiang Mai, 2019).

⁷⁷ See for instance Kumari Jayawardene, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1994); Ellen Carol Dubois and Katie Oliviero (eds.), Special Issue on 'Circling the Globe: International Feminism Reconsidered, 1910 to 1975', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009); Francisca de Haan, 'Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation', *Women's History Review*, 19 (2010), 547–73; Francisca de Haan et al., *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1980s to the Present* (Oxford, 2013); Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford, 2017); Katherine M. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, 2019).

⁷⁸ Devaki Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington, 2005).

⁷⁹ Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crisis and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspective* (New York, 1985).

DAWN's analysis and aims an affirmation of their own experiences and visions of a better life'.⁸⁰ Sen and Grown challenged the implicit assumption that lay behind many of the UN projects of the Decade, that women simply needed to participate more fully in the development process, and instead pointed to the deeper socio-economic problems within the process of industrialisation that limited women's access to resources and their capacity to fulfil basic needs. How does the history of internationalism and its power relations thus change when we centre women of the Global South, and the organisations they founded to create a collective voice on the international stage?⁸¹

Apart from these rich organisational histories, the archives of activists in the Global South also exist in the form of personal libraries, such as that of Anwar Fazal, the Penang-based president of the International Consumers' Association, a treasure trove for scholars researching Third World activism. The rich histories of transnational activism come alive through oral history and dialogues with other activists – from the vibrant, dynamic history of leftist internationalism in Asia and Africa in the 1950s and early 1960s, to the struggles of activists to cope with authoritarian regimes propped up by cold war power in the 1960s and 1970s, to a new generation of feminists, environmental activists and consumers' movements emerging with the rise of NGOs in the 1980s, which produced a range of new South–South platforms. To return to the island of Penang, which I mentioned earlier, the interwar internationalism evident in its playgrounds and publications continued well into the latter half of the twentieth century due to the island's long culture of associational life, its outward-facing multi-ethnic identity, its leftist politics and the activism of a few key individuals. As Matthew Hilton has detailed, the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), founded in 1969, succeeded in providing a new paradigm of Third World consumer activism, examining the role of producers as well as consumers amidst the onslaught of rapid industrialisation and environmental degradation.⁸² Penang would later become the central headquarters of Consumers' International under Fazal, while CAP's long-time president Mohammed Idris would go on to form the Third World Network organisation, which sought to strengthen cooperation across the Global South, particularly around equitable and sustainable development, and represent the interests of the South in international forums. While headquartered in Penang, the organisation is represented in Geneva and has regional secretariats in Accra and Uruguay.

What new perspectives emerge when we listen to the people who lived and practised these South–South internationalisms, or those whose parents and mentors came from previous generations of transnational networking across the Tricontinental world? How do multiple generations of activists from the Global South engage with these wider histories of internationalism? What does collaborative and co-produced research with and between these figures yield?

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹ Aurora Levins Morales, 'The Historian as Curandera', in *Women in Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott et al. (Oxford, 1998), 134–47.

⁸² Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity for All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization* (Ithaca, 2009), 75–97.

The methodology behind the Afro-Asian Networks project brought together scholars at the point of archival inquiry.⁸³ But we recognised that we were scholars based at universities in the Global North, benefiting from institutional and economic inequalities in intellectual practice. As we were all too aware, the work of a global historian has long involved well-funded scholars visiting different archives and discussing ideas at international conferences, often with the ease of travel granted to the bearers of Western passports.⁸⁴ What does it mean for the history of internationalism when Asian and African researchers are three or four times more likely to face visa difficulties for short visits, and opt not to attend conferences in the Global North, in the historically dominant power-centres of intellectual production?⁸⁵ What does the history of internationalism look like when it is largely scholars from the Global North who are able to visit the archives of international organisations, or participate in international conferences and events where the history of internationalism and South–South cooperation is discussed and debated? Several institutions and scholarly associations have opted, and have advocated, to hold conferences in the Global South for exactly these reasons.⁸⁶ Others have learned lessons from online collaboration during the pandemic to circumvent such issues.

Despite Ita and Kamala's living links with a history of Indonesian and Global South internationalism, it is telling that the archives documenting the life and writings of Soedjatmoko and those of Indonesian internationalist women were inaccessible to the very communities who needed to know and publicise their history. Kamala created a digital repository of Soedjatmoko's writings, *Membaca Soedjatmoko*, because she knew that public intellectuals outside academia would not be able to access many of his articles and essays without an institutional affiliation, and wanted to make them more accessible to young Indonesian historians and activists. She used the archive as a platform to inaugurate a series of seminars and conversations with Indonesian civil society about the role of intellectuals in Indonesian development. As a feminist activist, Ita was inspired by a network of women of the Left, both socialist and communist, who had travelled as far as Colombo and Cairo for Afro-Asian

⁸³ Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, 'Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa', *Radical History Review*, 131 (2018), 176–82.

⁸⁴ Emily Callaci, 'On Acknowledgments', *The American Historical Review*, 125 (2020), 126–31; Elisabeth Leake, '(In)accessible Stories and the Contingency of History Writing', History Workshop online, 27 May 2022, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/museums-archives-heritage/inaccessible-stories-and-the-contingency-of-history-writing>.

⁸⁵ Connie Nshemereirwe, 'Tear Down Visa Barriers That Block Scholarship', *Nature*, 563:7 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-07179-2>; Gordon R. McNroy *et al.*, 'International Movement and Science: A Survey of Researchers by the Together Science Can campaign', *RAND Research Reports* (Santa Monica, 2018), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2690.html.

⁸⁶ See for instance 'Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge', a transnational platform convening scholars, artists, intellectuals and educators from Africa, Asia and Europe which held its 2015 and 2018 conferences in Accra and Dar es Salaam respectively, hosted by the University of Ghana and the University of Dar es Salaam. See Philippe Peycam, 'Towards an Autonomous Academic Africa-Asia Framework', *IAS Newsletter*, 73 (2016), <https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/africa-asia-framework>. See also Insa Nolte, 'The Future of African Studies', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31 (2019), 296–313.

Women's Conferences in 1957 and 1961. But as an independent scholar, she had trouble getting funding to use the International Institute of Social History (IISH) archives in Amsterdam to research the internationalist networks of Indonesian leftist women, some of whom had been interviewed by her husband Hersri Setiawan, a leading member of the AAWB in Colombo.⁸⁷

Troubled by Ita's inability to find funds to research Indonesian leftist women in European archives, I wanted to create a new iteration of the Afro-Asian Networks collaborative project that would bring together a group of scholar-activists from the Global South to engage in collaborative research on global histories of the Left in South and Southeast Asia. As with the initial project, a major component was a week of collaborative research at the IISH in Amsterdam, one of the world's most important archives of leftist internationalism: it holds archives of the Socialist International and International Confederation of Trade Unions, but also important collections of oral histories and documents related to the Indonesian and Malay Left. As it was in World War II, the archive's mission is to preserve the history of oppressed social movements around the world, namely those under threat by the state or not included in national archives.

It is worth commenting that both the Indonesian participants faced visa difficulties and were almost denied entry by the very country that had colonised their homeland for three hundred years, one opting not to come. In the end, there were five of us engaging in one week of collaborative archival research in Amsterdam. They included scholar-activists from South and Southeast Asia keen to participate in dialogues around Afro-Asian and socialist internationalism and use the archives, and who would not normally have access to institutional funds or envision the archive as a possible repository for research. These participants came from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore, respectively. Some 'lived' these histories, as children of the first generation of socialist intellectuals in their countries. Ita was able to continue her research into Indonesian leftist women and investigate the recently acquired archives of the leftist internationalist Francisca Fangidaaj, who died in exile in the Netherlands. Ita's long history of transnational activism in the region, as a student activist, a feminist and a social campaigner – with Third World Network, with DAWN – made her an invaluable sounding board. Agnes Khoo published a book on oral histories with women involved in the Malayan Communist Party and similarly was involved in various Singaporean activist movements in the 1980s and 1990s; she has taught on development at universities in Ghana and Asia (she was an adjunct lecturer in Seoul at the time, and is now a senior lecturer at Shenzhen Technological University).⁸⁸ Fadiyah Nadwa Fikri is a PhD candidate at the National University of Singapore, who practised as a human rights lawyer in Malaysia before embarking on a PhD to untangle the primacy of ethnic nationalism in the making of post-colonial Malaya. Sandev Handy is a curator at the Sri Lanka Museum of Modern Art, who co-curated the 2022

⁸⁷ On the AAWB, see Yoon, "Our Forces Have Redoubled".

⁸⁸ See Agnes Khoo, *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-colonial Struggle (an oral history of women from Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore)* (Monmouth, 2007).

exhibition 'Encounters', a rotating display featuring art and artefacts that spoke to Sri Lanka's global engagements in the Bandung era, including the AAWB in Colombo.

We were also joined online by Kathleen Ditzig and Carlos Quinon Jr, curators respectively based in Singapore and Manila who had recently collaborated on a digital and travelling exhibition on Afro-Southeast Asian affinities.⁸⁹ Along with Sandev, who spoke about 'Encounters', they showed us ways of bringing these histories of internationalism to life through art and artefacts, drawing them into contemporary histories of the image and social media.⁹⁰ Ita presented on her work on a mobile museum, a model that she had learned about in Johannesburg's District 6 Museum through her work with DAWN. This was a collaboration between herself and young artists and activists to build awareness of the survivors of the 1965 political genocide against the Left in Indonesia through their private archives – bicycles, dresses, shoes, notebooks and photographs – from their time on Buru Island, the notorious prison camp to which they had been sent. These survivors included Hersri, who had previously been involved in the AAWB, and spoke to the consequences faced by leftist internationalists under the repression of authoritarian regimes propped up by the United States in the midst of a global cold war. Bonnie Triyana, the founder of the Indonesian popular history magazine *Historia* and the lead curator for a stunning new exhibition at the Rijksmuseum, showed us how art objects could bring to life transnational histories of the Indonesian Revolution.

From the outset, the relations within the group were characterised by extraordinary dynamism, and the cooperative spirit with which we approached the archives was enhanced by multiple conversations about resonances and differences across decades and with the present day. (See Figure 2.) Though some of Agnes's previous work had taken a comparative approach, the historical work that Fadiyah, Ita and Sandev had been unearthing on the Malay, Indonesian and Sri Lankan Left had previously been centred within national frameworks, and the opportunity to discuss these histories within a broader context yielded a host of exciting new insights and an understanding of the ways in which transnational connections were 'lived'. Fadiyah and Ita soon uncovered the channels through which the Malay Left gave support to communist women from Indonesia during the revolutionary period. Ita's husband, Hersri Setiawan, had been a member of the AAWB, which Sandev had been researching for his exhibition, and Ita's Sri Lankan colleagues in the Asian feminist movement had inspired Sandev's own activism.

The questions that this multigenerational group asked of the era of Afro-Asian solidarity were fresh, intimate and profoundly grounded in contemporary histories of activism. They included questions that brought class much more firmly into the picture of Afro-Asian solidarity, examining the stakes of participating in international forums versus grass-roots activism. Coming from various locations, they were attuned to the varying ways in which Afro-Asianism was

⁸⁹ See Afro-Southeast Asia, <http://afrosoutheastasia.com/> (accessed 5 Jun. 2023).

⁹⁰ Jessica Hammett *et al.*, 'Art, Collaboration and Multi-sensory Approaches in Public Microhistory: Journey with Absent Friends', *History Workshop Journal*, 89 (2020), 246–69.



Figure 2. Archival collaboration at the IISH.

lived and practised by people from across the social spectrum. Carlos and Kathleen introduced us to Afro-Asian affinities as a field of competing political interests, while Sandev questioned the elite cosmopolitanism of those working at Colombo's AAWB. Fadiyah, meanwhile, uncovered documents that spoke to the internationalism of the Malayan Communist Party's Tenth Regiment, a regiment made up mainly of Malay soldiers based in guerrilla bases on the Thai border, and came upon their expressions of solidarity with people fighting against colonialism and imperialism elsewhere in the world. In morning seminars, we engaged in deeper discussions about the nature of the Left: its fractures, divisions and the gulfs that often emerged between leftist internationalists and grass-roots leftist social movements. The ensuing dialogue spoke to the legacies, the fissures, the challenges and the possibilities of connecting histories of activism and internationalism in and across the Global South.⁹¹

In highlighting the richness of these collaborative modes of research, I also wanted to point to other projects that have taken a similar approach. These include Afro-Asian Futures Past, a collaborative research programme at the American University of Beirut, which brings together multiple institutions across the Global South to investigate transnational intellectual exchanges in the Afro-Asian era. East Africa's Global Lives project held a collaborative archival workshop for UK and East African researchers to trace the biographies of East African individuals. As their recent article contends, life histories give us a richer view of the shifting nature of global connections

⁹¹ We continued these conversations at a 2022 workshop on transnational activism at the University of Gadjah Madah in Indonesia and will be publishing a collective dialogue that stemmed from some of these discussions.

and why these mattered – even, and perhaps especially, to those who were never able to travel.⁹² The e-workshop recently hosted by the Non-Aligned News Research Partnership brought together scholars from the Global North and South to examine the networks of journalists who sought to transform the economic and cultural imbalances in the flows of global news through the New World Information Order, both through UN Commissions and through autonomous transnational civil society networks across the Global South. Illuminating this global movement were three keynotes by living participants: the Argentinian journalist and activist Roberto Savio of the Inter Press News Service agency; the media sociologist Nabil Dajani, a member of the UNESCO panel on the New World Information Order; and the journalist and scholar Beatriz Bissio, founder of the magazine *Third World Books*.

Individual lives matter, but so do movements, and so do the multiple forums in which internationalism in the Global South came into being. Internationalism has been lived and practised in multiple ways. International governance institutions were, indeed, the most permanent, largely because of the institutional precedent, power and resources behind them that came from the Global North, galvanised by victory and anxious to protect the West's fragile ideological hegemony in 1945. Despite the hierarchies that imbued the organisation, the UN relied for its very existence on its members and interlocutors from the Global South, as well as its engagement with civil society actors who advised the organisation at both the international level and on the ground.

But operating at a no less important level was civil society in the Global South in its own right. For many of these actors, the UN was one platform among many – the village, the national, the regional, the Third Worldist, the developmental – to provide a space for members to confront issues of global inequality. South–South forums, particularly for leftist internationalists, were much more constrained than the UN amid a global cold war, and particularly due to the vast discrepancies in resources available for networking, projects and advocacy. But this is precisely why they need to be recovered and assessed, particularly as new generations of activists in the Global South engage in networks of solidarity against global inequality, environmental degradation and authoritarian regimes.

When discussing her current work with feminists in Sri Lanka and India, Kamala told me: 'Despite the connections from our parents' generation, we have no storyline that connects our work today with that history, with those old and once-powerful links.'⁹³ These links have been hindered by language barriers, by colonial legacies that created more connections with the metropole and subverted connections across the South, and by the rise of regimes that suppressed leftist activism and distorted its histories. All these have made these connections harder to stitch back together. Ita agrees, and says, 'If I

⁹² Ismay Milford, Gerard McCann and Emma Hunter, 'Another World? East Africa, Decolonisation, and the Global History of the Mid-Twentieth Century', *Journal of African Studies*, 62 (2021), 394–410.

⁹³ Kamala Chandrakirana, interview by author, 18 Feb. 2022.

read through the archive, the internationalist message is so strong – we have lost this vision,’ but ‘reclaiming the historical interconnections between women from all over the world will allow us to renew the movement’.⁹⁴

If we want to bring these histories to life, and to understand how internationalism was lived, as well as practised, we must engage with life histories, prosopography and organisational histories from multiple geographical and political perspectives. The act of decolonising history – of undoing, challenging and questioning structures of power – must also be an act of democratising history, of globalising history, of stitching back together and forming new regional connections across the South. It must involve making the archives of internationalism more accessible; broadening our view of internationalism; understanding what internationalism looks like from the point of view of activists who speak truth to power; creating opportunities for researchers and activists to meet across borders and recover these histories collaboratively. This can only enrich our collective understanding of internationalism – and in so doing, animate the narratives we tell about its multi-centred histories.

Data Availability Statement. All underlying data are available from sources referenced throughout this paper; this does not include oral history interviews under restricted access, available to bona fide researchers subject to a data access agreement.

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⁹⁴ Ita F. Nadia, interview by author, 22 Jun. 2023.

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